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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FRIENDS OF THE THOMAS FISHER RARE BOOK LIBRARY

ISSUE No. 4, November 1989

ISSN 0840-5565



The Classense Woodcuts

There is a certain amount of good fortune involved in the survival of fragile works of art over half a millennium, just as there is a component of luck in any successful negotiation for the foreign exhibition of those unique collections whose custodians yearly become increasingly reluctant to risk their treasures in travelling shows. The exhibition of fifteenth century Italian woodcuts from the Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna at the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (18 September-27 October, 1989) was the material result of happy coincidences of preservation and acquaintance, and the history of the collection and of its current loan is one worth telling.

By the middle of the fifteenth century the art and craft of printing from prepared woodblocks onto sheets of paper had developed to the extent that print shops throughout Western Europe were producing editions of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of popular devotional images, along with sets of gaming cards, and the first block-books. The next fifty years would see the spread of printing from moveable type, together with the adaptation of the woodblock to book illustration, and the adoption of the printing press for the efficient production of single-sheet woodcuts.

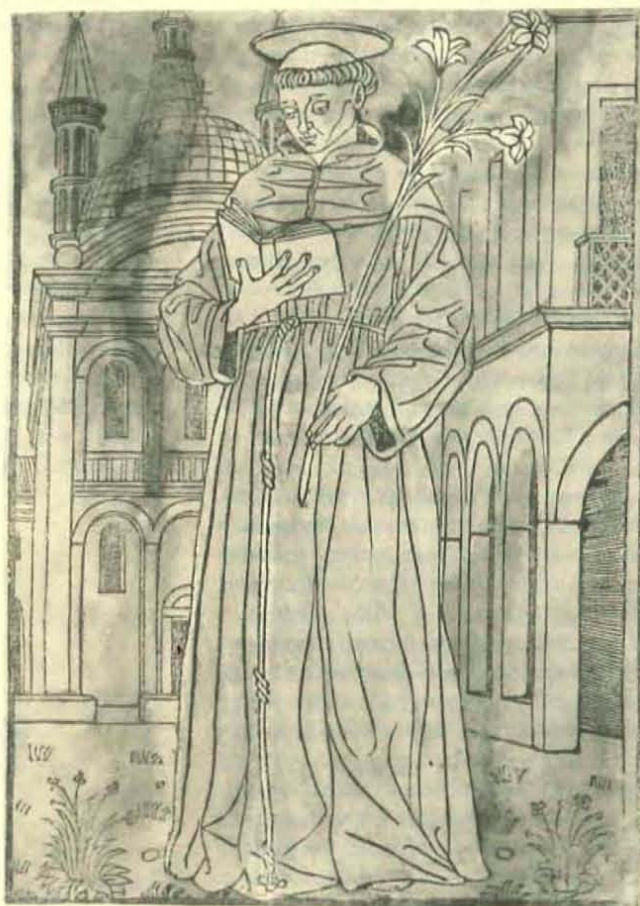
The German-speaking states of Central and Northwestern Europe, from Austria and Switzerland to the Low Countries, produced the greatest number of such prints, and the greater part of surviving fifteenth century single-sheet woodcuts, many of them unique copies, come from this area. For Italy, the Biblioteca Classense collection of forty-six images (which includes four engravings and one metal-cut), of which forty-two are unique,

constitutes the largest surviving group of fifteenth century Italian single-sheet woodcuts. Of these, all but one owe their survival to the activity of the notary Jacopo Rubieri.

Rubieri was not an important man in his time. As a canon lawyer he spent much of his career, during the second half of the fifteenth century, in those areas of Italy and the Dalmatian coast under Venetian influence. Towards the end of his life, he made manuscript copies of several minor legal texts, and had these bound up into books, decorating them with his own body-colour renderings, and with the devotional woodcuts and engravings he had collected on his professional travels. When he died, probably shortly after 1500, he left the manuscripts, with their precious cargo, to his friend Canali. Nothing more is known of them for two hundred years.

In 1711 a part of Rubieri's manuscripts was bought in Pesaro by Pietro Canneti, considered the founder of the modern Biblioteca Classense. He made no note of the illustrations, and it was not until 1896, more than four hundred years after Jacopo Rubieri made his will, that Andrea Zoli, then the librarian at Ravenna, discovered the great and unique treasure bequeathed by Rubieri—the woodcuts and engravings of the Classense collection.

Many of the prints had survived in poor condition, being inked in in black around the figures, and in 1938 they were cleaned and restored at the laboratories of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. During this process additional prints were found underneath some of the pasted-in sheets,



Saint Anthony of Padua, ca. 1470

enriching the collection by six images.

The Classense collection was exhibited in Rome in 1987, and the catalogue for that exhibition was published by Alfio Longo of Ravenna. It so happened that in April of the following year Longo found himself in Toronto as a participant in the Italian Connection symposium—organized by the University of Toronto, York University, and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura of Toronto—which explored the relationships between Canadian literature and Italian readers. The programme for the symposium included an exhibition and reception at the Thomas Fisher Library. The architecture, the collections, and the atmosphere of the library impressed Longo, and he suggested to Francesca

Valente, the Director of the Istituto Italiano di Cultura of Toronto, that the Thomas Fisher Library would be an excellent place to show a collection that he knew of in his home city. Negotiations began that summer, involving the Director of the Biblioteca Classense, Donatino Domini, the Assessore alla Cultura of the Comune di Ravenna, and the University of Toronto Library, and mediated by the Italian Cultural Institute. By September 1988 the loan of the prints had been agreed upon, and preparations for the exhibition begun.

While preparations continued at the University of Toronto Library, additional venues for the show were established through the agency of the Italian Cultural Institutes in Chicago, New York and Toronto. Thus, after Toronto, the exhibition will travel to the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Newberry Library in Chicago, and The Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. What began as a single exhibition became a North American tour, which will end in New York in August 1990.

As I write, the prints are installed in the exhibition cases of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, where they make a splendid and instructive display. I had worked with the colour reproductions of the prints in the Italian catalogue for several months, so it was a very exciting moment for me when Dott. Domini arrived from Ravenna at the Fisher Library on Tuesday, September 12, with the collection secured in two specially constructed metal cases, and I was at last able to see the prints themselves. As is so often the case, the reproductions did not do justice to the actual works. To see these early woodcuts is to respect the genius and skill of the artists and artisans who made them, and to gain an insight into the religious certainties and physical uncertainties of daily life in Italy as the Medieval era gave way to the Renaissance.

In particular, the choice of *Saint Anthony of Padua* for our poster and for the catalogue cover illustration proved to be a fortunate one. Long regarded as a masterpiece among fifteenth century Italian woodcuts, it was further singled out by Dr. Howard Collinson of the Royal Ontario Museum, who spoke at the opening reception, as one of the finest woodcuts of all time. Yet this five-hundred-year-old print was unknown to art historians before 1896, and its architectural background was only revealed when the coating of black pigment which silhouetted the figure was removed in 1938. That we can see it and its fellows in

the Classense collection here in Toronto today is a tribute to the work of the scribe/collector Jacopo Rubieri, to the care (or perhaps, benign neglect) of the unknown owners of Rubieri's manuscripts during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the humanistic interests and collecting acumen of Pietro Canneti, to the scholarly inquisitiveness of Andre Zoli, to the painstaking restoration work supervised by Lamberto Donati, and to the goodwill, and willingness to let his "precious scraps of paper" travel, of the present Director of the Biblioteca Classense, Donatino Domini.

It is my hope that this first link forged between the Biblioteca Classense, one of the most important long-established Italian libraries, and the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, among the newest of rare book libraries, yet one whose history nevertheless extends back to the nineteenth-century beginnings of the University of Toronto, will lead to greater cooperation, and perhaps, new exhibitions in the future.

Robin Healey



1989: The Director Travels

For much of 1989 I have been on leave from the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library and have spent my time teaching, doing research, attending conferences and meetings, and, of course, acquiring a few books and manuscripts for the collections.

During the spring term I held an appointment as Visiting Professor in the School of Library Service at Columbia University in New York. I taught two courses: Introduction to Descriptive Bibliography and Curatorship of Special Collections. I had eighteen students in Descriptive Bibliography, divided into two sections so that I could use the Bibliography Room, a bibliographical laboratory with printing presses, teaching examples of books and manuscripts, reference sources, and a four-foot papyrus plant. Thirteen students enrolled in the Curatorship class.

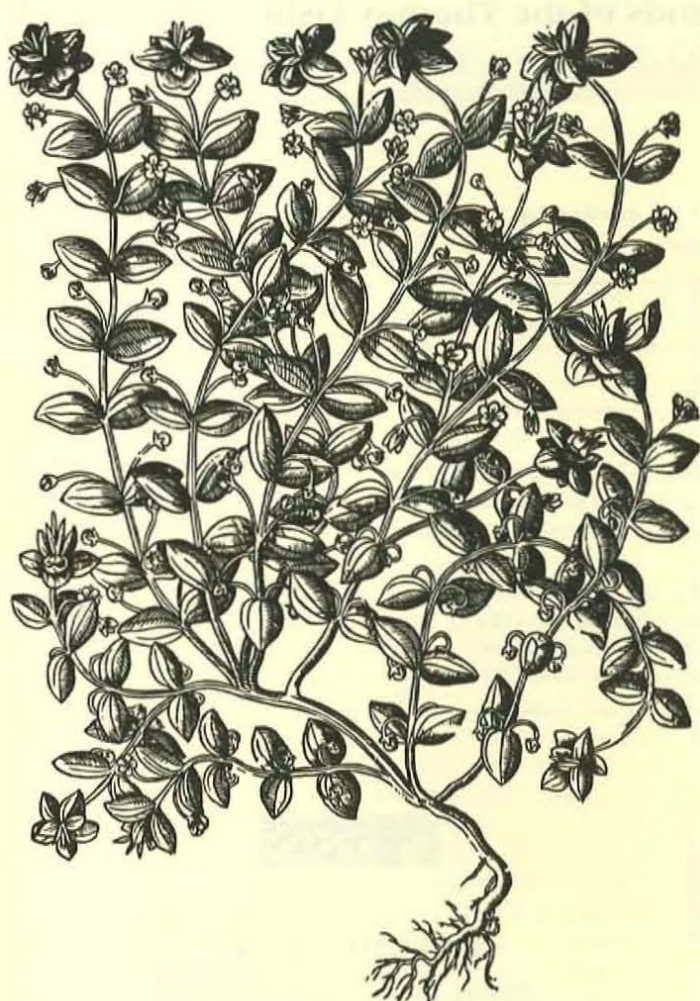
The students ranged from those with recent undergraduate degrees in several subject disciplines and no experience of special collections and bibliography to some with advanced degrees and years of experience of various kinds. Columbia attracts good students in the this field because the School of Library Service has for many years emphasized studies in the history of the book and bibliography. And its programme of regular courses and the Rare Book Summer School, directed by Terry Belanger, are well known. Belanger will be addressing the Friends of Fisher on March 19th. The attention of my students tended to be focused by the realization that graduate fees at Columbia are now almost \$15,000 per year and one felt they wished to get their money's worth. For whatever reason, they were serious students who did very good work for me.

I lived in a Columbia faculty apartment at 119th Street and Morningside Drive, that is, the Harlem side of Columbia, an area with its own peculiar urban ambience. Nothing dreadful happened to me although security measures at Columbia are a good deal more obvious than at Toronto. Most importantly I was five minutes from my office and an easy subway or taxi ride from mid-Manhattan.

Because I had no administrative responsibilities I had time to do some research, read some books I ought to have read years ago, and write. I was able to finish a longish article on the Stillman Drake Galileo collection at Toronto, written from the perspective of Galileo's scientific career, which will appear in print in February and finish the revision of an article on Australian history and literature, centred on the Exile Narratives, which will be published in *Descant* in December. My contract with Columbia required me to present a public lecture and, in April, I delivered "Knight Errant of Bibliography: Robert Curzon, 14th Baron Zouche" to a large and seemingly enthusiastic audience.

During the term, I was asked to be an expert witness in a trial for alleged patent infringement involving paper-making machinery which necessitated trips to Ottawa and Toronto. Pat Fleming and I both testified in court, successfully we feel, but we still await the judge's decision in a rather complex case.

I was also able to travel around the U.S.A. a bit and attended an antiquarian book fair in San Francisco in February, Spring Training in Phoenix in March (during Columbia's spring break), the New York antiquarian book fair and the conference of the Society for Textual Scholarship.



A print from the Mattioli woodblock of amagallis arvensis, or, the scarlet pimpernel ca. 1565

In May, as soon as the term was finished and I had handed in my grades, I went to Italy and spent a month in Rome, Florence, Siena, Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna, Venice, Genoa, Nappallo, and Milan looking in general but also searching for, and photographing, images of the book in early mosaics and frescoes. I thus saw a great many depictions of Saint Jerome and the Annunciation and some of my photographs even turned out. I did not see everything I wanted to and will, of course, have to return there soon.

From Italy I travelled by train to Switzerland, spending a few days in Lausanne, and on to France and England. For most of June I worked in London (at the British Library) and in Cambridge on James Edwards and James Lackington and the development of the trade in antiquarian books in England during the latter part of the eighteenth century. I then returned to Toronto.

In August I went to Paris to chair the meetings of the Rare Books and Manuscripts section of the International Federation of Library Associations. The meetings were interesting and successful, and because of the French bicentennial there were a good many spectacular receptions. I went on to Belgium from France and spent some time in Bruges, Ghent and Antwerp, most particularly in the Plautia-Moretus Museum, one of the most interesting museums of the book in Europe.

From Belgium I returned to England for the Rare Books and Manuscripts Conference in Cambridge in September, where I delivered a paper called: "The Two James's: Edwards and Lackington and the Development of Antiquarian Bookselling in Great Britain". The theme of the conference was the history of the antiquarian book trade and, as a whole, it was judged to have been a great success. I

arrived back in Toronto to coincide with my first class in Descriptive Bibliography and have adjusted myself to being back in the Fisher Library and the University again.

In October the International Committee of the Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue met in Worcester, Massachusetts, and I attended the meetings in my capacity as secretary. The committee plans to publish next year, possibly in the form of a CD-ROM, the interim file of records as now held in the joint database. Approximately 10,000 University of Toronto records are currently in the database.

In November I travelled to Houston to attend a conference on forgeries. Although there was some discussion of the long history of the forgery of documents most of the delegates' attention was focused on the recently discovered Texas forgeries about which Tom Taylor talked to the Friends of Fisher earlier this year. The Hofmann case involving the forgery of Mormon documents and the "Oath of a Freeman" was also discussed and there was a valuable exchange of views concerning the response of institutions and the trade to the many historical and legal issues raised by literary forgery.

In the course of my travels I had many wonderful opportunities to acquire books and manuscripts and seized several of them to add to my personal collections. I did however, arrange to buy two outstanding items for the Fisher Library: an original Mattioli woodblock of 1565 and another set of Charles Darwin proof-sheets. The woodblock, which depicts chicory, was one of a series cut for editions of Mattioli's herbal in 1562 and 1565, the finest illustrated herbal of the century. That any woodblocks from the 16th century should survive is a minor miracle, but I was shown in London a whole collection of them and was fortunate enough to buy one for Toronto.

Another set of Darwin proof-sheets also turned up in England: *The Effects of Cross and Self of Fertilization in the Vegetable Kingdom* (London, Murray, 1876). It is corrected by Darwin and each gathering is labelled "1st proof in sheet". The SSHRC Fleeting Opportunities programme has contributed approximately two thirds of the price and I am very pleased to add it to the Darwin Collection.

A trip to British Columbia for Christmas will conclude my wanderings for 1989. It has been a good year and I wonder whether the kingfisher normally migrates?

Richard Landon



Notes from the Editor

We have been fortunate in getting excellent reviews in the Press for two of our recent exhibitions. On 9 September, the *Globe and Mail* wrote of the *Fifteenth Century Italian Woodcuts* (about which Robin Healey writes in this issue) that it was one of "the scholarly little shows that shouldn't be allowed to slip between the cracks"; and then on October 20 John Bentley Mays gave it a full and positive review. Earlier in the year, the exhibition 1789: *Année de la Liberté* was described, also in *The Globe*, as "a show of printed materials that no one who delights in things French and revolutionary can afford to miss."

I have to confess to using tough persuasion techniques to get Richard Landon to write his piece on his recent travels. I hope that readers find it interesting.

The proposed article on Thomas Fisher, for whom the Fisher Library is named, has been held back to a later issue.

Thanks for the preparation of this issue are due to Veronica Fisher in the Robarts Library. She has been responsible for the layout of this issue and for seeing it through the press. The photographs are the work of Jim Ingram and Philip Ower.

Please send comments and suggestions about this issue or future issues to the Editor, Alan Horne, Director, Development and Public Affairs, University of Toronto Library, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A5 (416-978-7644).

The Friends of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library

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Programme for January—April 1990

19 January 1990, 6:00 pm - 10:00 pm

Open House to celebrate the first five years of the Friends with events including an exhibition of major donations, a slide show of treasures of the Fisher Library, tours of selected areas, and refreshments.

Special invitations are being prepared: you are encouraged to bring an interested friend. Sign-ups for the tours will be necessary as numbers for each of these must be restricted.

Please mark this in your calendar!

19 March 1990, 8:00 pm

Professor Terry Belanger, Columbia University, School of Library Service, will give an illustrated lecture on "Lunacy and Books in Pictures", which will be a light-hearted survey of the history of the use of the book in paintings and the graphic arts.

Additional programme in April

We are hoping to arrange a talk by a visiting English bookseller for April. More details later.

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University of Toronto Library
Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A5